



EUROPEAN COMMISSION SHOULD PUBLISH LEAGUE TABLE OF PUBLIC SERVICE PERFORMANCE

Report calls for EU to create a “single market in governance”

The EU could rehabilitate national democracy through publishing comparative data on taxation and public services within member states, according to a new pamphlet from the Foreign Policy Centre. Report author Tom Arbuthnott calls on the European Commission to publish an easily understood league table and publicise the best and worst performers over a range of domestic policy goals, but warns that it will have to overcome its previous reluctance to criticise member states directly.

He argues that the growth of the Internet and the development of reliable indicators that compare performance could create a “single market in governance”, informing voters about how well their governments are governing compared to EU member states. It also allows people to choose to the services or taxation regimes of another EU government in preference to their own - from universities to fuel prices.

“The EU has gone further than any other organisation in providing a framework in which it is easy to compare and contrast”

“More and more the mantra of “best practice” has come to dominate European policy-making - but

The drive for greater efficiency should be welcomed, but the political competition between member states can be overlooked if too narrow a focus is taken”

There is a danger that the indicators could be entirely removed from the real political choices. The Commission must ensure that social goals are included as well as “innovation”, “wealth” and “productivity”. Benchmarks should also be based around quality of life, working weeks, holiday entitlements and crime.

Kitemark statistics, showing that they come from a reliable source, usually Eurostat. An equivalent of the Advertising Standards Authority could be created to pass judgements on the use of statistics in political campaigns.

Is Europe reviving national democracy? argues that the use of “European average” statistics is already changing policy. Friends of the Earth have based their campaign to increase recycling on EU figures that show the UK languishing at the bottom of the European league. European Governments have also begun to set fiscal policies according to the “European average”. President Chirac has pledged to reduce the rate of corporation tax to “la moyenne Europeenne” within five years, Gerhard Schroder has made a similar pledge in Germany, and Blair has promised to raise NHS expenditure to the European Average by 2005. But it warns that current figures that claim to be comparative can be misleading - comparing different systems based on very different data.

But the pamphlet argues that this use of benchmarking in the media can be misleading, comparing very different systems with data collected in very different ways. The report calls for the EC to emulate the rigorous benchmarking of the corporate world, where it is undergoing massive

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expansion. A recent poll showed that over seventy per cent of companies believed that benchmarking would lead to improved performance, whilst over 80 per cent of companies felt that the internet would result in the transfer of best practices.

.ANALYSIS: WHY COMPARATIVE STATISTICS ARE INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT:

- **A diverse Europe of 25 member states makes it necessary to state objectives rather than prescribe policy changes to member states.** This has already begun with the “Lisbon process” on the economy, employment and the environment.
- **Freedom of Information means that Governments are increasingly publishing statistics that would once have remained confidential.** The UN’s “resolution on the best use of statistics” in 1994 has been matched by similar initiatives in the WTO, the UN, the European Commission, the OECD and the International Monetary Fund.
- **The internet and other modern communications make it easier than ever before to disseminate comparative statistics.** No longer are government departments exclusively reliant on official channels of communication or the news media to disseminate ideas

Tom Arbuthnott said:

“Comparative statistics on the performance of public services will can put pressure on Governments to perform better, or they can vote with their feet to put pressure on Governments”

“Only if the sanction is some years in the electoral wilderness, rather than a strongly worded rebuke from the Commission, will the democratic potential of these processes be achieved”.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. *Is Europe reviving national democracy?* is strictly embargoed until
2. The Foreign Policy Centre was set up in 1998 by Tony Blair (Patron) and Robin Cook (President) to rethink foreign policy for an age of globalisation.
3. Tom Arbuthnott is Europe Programme Manager at the Foreign Policy Centre.

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